

March 18th 2009
House Education Committee
Wanda Grinde Chairman
SB-81 Senator Dan McGee

I thank you Chairman and Committee members for allowing me to speak today. I am Elaine Herman from Helena MT. I speak today on behalf of Eagle Forum; a non-partisan, non-denominational, organization that desires to strengthen Faith, Family and Country.

SB-81 is a non-partisan non-political bill. It changes no laws nor has any partisan agenda. SB-81 simply puts a political issue to the voters of Montana and enables them the right to vote on this bill just like you have the right today to vote on it. The people want to vote their opinions, just like you do. To deny the people the right to vote on SB-81 is telling your constituents that you know better than they so you will not allow them to vote on such an important issue as their children's education.

We have American soldiers laying down their lives to enable Middle Eastern countries people the right to vote. Americans could say we know what is best for you so we are just going to take over your country and run it for you. But that is not the American way. Our soldiers are giving their lives to give strangers the opportunity to vote on political issues. Your constituents are not strangers to you. Your constituents have placed faith in you being fair to them. Your constituents are Montanans and Americans and they believe in the voting process. You do not have to lay down your life for them to give them the opportunity to vote on SB-81. You simply have to vote "YES" on Sb-81 and then you and your constituents can voice your opinions and beliefs at the ballot box. It is the American way.

It may be tempting to rationalize a reason that possibly sounds logical to prevent SB-81 from being on the ballot if you are against electing the State Board of Education. Voting "YES" leaves open the possibility that your belief is not the majority and by voting "NO" you could stop this before it can be voted on. But this is a weak and fearful stand. It is not the way Montanans believe. You would understand that it is wrong if you had the opportunity to be appointed to represent your district without going through the test of the election process by the people. Would it be tempting to jump on that opportunity? Of course, any of us would be tempted. Who wants to run through fire if you can walk around it and get the same reward? No one. But

this is not the American way and I ask you to do the right thing rather than what is the easiest. Vote "YES" on SB-81.

A point being made by the opponent's to vote "NO" on SB-81 is that electing the State Board will make education political. I remind you that before 1972 and the forming of the State Board of Education in the new Constitution the Local School Board was and continues to be elected. Those elections did not make education political. When the State Board was formed it took power from the Local School Boards and gave it to the newly formed State Board of Education. If the old constitution believed the Local School Board should be elected and they were forming a new State School Board with even more power than the Local School Board then the reasoning would be that the election process would follow with the power. This did not happen and that is what SB-81 is all about. SB-81 will give the voters the opportunity to decide if that was good or if it was a mistake that needs to be fixed.

POWER + MONEY = Politics. The State Board of Education has 100% power over the Public School System. They have the power to make laws and rules on public school issues. That is ultimate power. The State Board of Education spends more than 55% of the State's Tax money. That is ultimate power. The State Board of Education is the SINGLE MOST POWERFUL POLITICAL MACHINE in the State. SB-81 is not making it that. It is THAT! What is hard to believe is that this single most powerful political machine in the State does not answer to the public or anyone else. Every other law-making, tax-spending, government body answers to the people through the election process. Education should not be an exception. It is a process that we are discussing that Americans and Montanans believe in even if they do not get their own way at the ballot box. Please vote "yes" on SB-81.

Thank you for your time.
Sincerely, Elaine